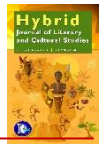
Decolonising neo-colonialism: Resistance in Mbuh Tennu Mbuh's *The Oracle of Tears (2006)*



Review article

Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global in the ***Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies***, Volume 3, Issue 2, 2021

Article Information
Submitted: 15th December 2020
Accepted: 4th February 2021
Published: 24th February 2021

Additional information is available at the end of the article

ISSN 2707-2150 (Online)
ISSN 2707-2169 (Print)

To read the paper online, please scan this QR code

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Abstract

This article investigates the ways in which Mbuh Tennu Mbuh's poems contribute to the on-going debate on resistance to oppression (in)direct Western hegemonies. European colonialism, having led to new, indirect forms of oppression in African states, is perceived as a continuing practice which obliges the oppressed to permanently rework their resistance strategies. This paper is premised on the assumption that Mbuh's selected poems in *The Oracle of Tears* advocate a practice of resistance to neo-colonialism that consists in three important phases: re-visiting the colonial past, observing its present displays and overtly condemning its perpetuation. Postcolonialism is used as theoretical base for this study because it's raison d'être is the dismantling of overt and subtle forms of Western domination. This paper arrives at the conclusion that the problems of post-independence Africa in general and Cameroon in particular are better understood when read as effects of the whole colonial syndrome. Such reading also reiterates the call for a united African resistance against (in) direct Western hegemony.

Keywords: gazing, memory, neo-colonialism, resistance, voicing

How to Cite:
Forbang-Looh, G. N. (2021). Decolonising neo-colonialism: Resistance in Mbuh's The Oracle of Tears (2006). *Hybrid Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, *3*(2). Retrieved from https://royalliteglobal.com/hybrid-literary/article/view/550

Public Interest Statement

The significance of this paper is found not only in the choice of author who has rarely been given critical attention in spite of huge poetic energy but also in the fact that he handles so many issues in his poetry, one of it, being the influence of neo-colonialism and he how it can be resisted. Thus, in order to better address the problems that Africa is facing today, a very critical appraisal needs to be done to better appreciate neo-colonial displays of power and find sustainable ways to overturn them.

Introduction

Colonial enterprise has greatly dehumanised African people. The violence and ignominy of European colonisation on African cultures and indigenous political structures have had far-reaching effects on both the African psyche and what we identify today as African states. On the grounds of cultural, physical and economic violence meted on colonised Africans in particular and non-Europeans as a whole, many intellectuals have engaged in debates surrounding 'how' colonialism can be successfully resisted and dismantled. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* submit that "all [postcolonial critics] are agreed, in some sense, that the main problem is how to effect agency for the post-colonial subject. But the contentious issue of how this is to be attained remains unresolved" (9). Hence, the way out of oppression is an on-going debate in which contributions and suggestions are still needed. In his poem, "Africa's Journey", Emmanuel Fru Doh presents Africa's main problem today as one of freedom, freedom from the claws of European colonialism. He writes: "[Europe] chained your hands, and today, from these shackles/To free thyself remains/The greatest blight, rearing its ugly/Head in different shades…" (18). As these lines indicate, the greatest struggle for Africans today is identifying and resisting the various forms that European colonialism uses to oppress them continually.

In this regard, this paper poses this question: How does Mbuh's poetry articulate the question of resistance to oppression? This research aims at demonstrating that Mbuh's poems present the socio-economic and political quagmires of Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, as the results of a wider hegemonic system, namely European colonisation – an enterprise whose inhumanity should be remembered, whose mutations should be identified and whose perpetuation should be condemned. This paper seeks to show that Mbuh writes with the consciousness that resistance can only be successful when it revisits the roots of oppression; when it considers the present ramifications of oppressive practices and overtly indicts their perpetuation. This study rests on the argument that memory, gazing and voicing articulate resistance

to neo-colonialism in Mbuh's poetry. The selected poems in Mbuh's *The Oracle of Tears* present a personified practice of resistance to neo-colonialism. The mind, the eyes and the mouth are used in these poems as vehicles of resistance respectively engaging memory, observation and speech in the process that one should follow to resist neo-colonial domination. Such embodiments of resistance emphasize its feasibility.

Among Anglophone Cameroonian poets, Mbuh Tennu Mbuh stands out as one of the most hermetic. In his comment on *The Oracle of Tears*, Kashim Ibrahim Tala acknowledges that readers of this collection "will be impressed by the linguistic energy of the poet". Understanding his poetry is a challenge because one needs to decode the insightful meanings enwrapped in layers of linguistic turns. This seems to explain the absence of critical works written on this collection. The seven poems selected for this study are: "Reply to Ted Jones", "I Still Hear the Vulture", "To Our Hon. MPs on Their Last Extra-Ordinary", "Dangling Horizons", "I Defy!", "Franc Power" and "Nemesis". These poems are used in this article because they discuss the way in which post-independence problems spring from the colonial encounter and depict three steps in the practice of resistance: remembering, observing and speaking.

Theoretical Considerations

This paper uses the postcolonial literary theory. Anthony Chennells in "Essential Diversity: Post-colonial Theory and African Literature" submits that this theory "is concerned with the worlds which colonialism in its multiple manifestations, confused, disfigured and distorted, reconfigured and finally transformed" (110). It is a theory that examines mechanisms of colonial power and advocates the subversion and deconstruction of colonial myths and institutions by the colonised. Those who for centuries have experienced the vicious contouring of their identities, histories and geographies are thus offered an arena for resistance and freedom from imperial discourses.

Postcolonial scholars have dealt differently with the question of resistance. While Frantz Fanon and Edward Said present resistance as a binary, frontal opposition of the colonised to the colonial system, Homi Bhabha explains that the coloniser unintentionally participates in this resistance process. Moore-Gilbert et al in *Postcolonial Criticism* explain Bhabha's postulate that colonial power is always liable to "intransitive" resistance. The persistent desire of the colonial system to permanently control its subjects unconsciously motivates refusal to obey and this weakens colonialism because it is a power whose operation partly depends on "a colonized Other who is potentially hostile" (34). These inherent weaknesses of colonial power (untamed desire to control and dependence on the oppressed) enable a "resistance

from within" the colonial structure (34). What then is resistance? Moore-Gilbert et al say that "in more ostensibly conventional terms", resistance is "the expression of the agency of the colonized" (35). It is the sum total of his/her ideological, political and military reactions to an oppressive and exploitative system. It is also the subtle dismantling of colonial power using its weaknesses.

Resistance is thus a central concept to postcolonialism. David Jeffress in "Changing the Story: Postcolonial Studies and Resistance" opines that "in many ways, the subject of postcolonial criticism is 'resistance' and postcolonialism is a project of 'resistance' itself" (7). Resistance is mainly discussed from four angles in postcolonial theory. The first is cultural resistance which analyses the manner in which postcolonial writers attack the cultural assumptions of colonialism embedded in European colonial narratives. The second angle from which resistance is perceived is subversion. This implies a discursive refusal to act within the frames, and according to the expectations, of the coloniser. This is possible through hybridity, liminality and mimicry that depolarise the colonial relationship by allowing spaces for asymmetric responses to colonial authority. This perspective ties with Bhabha's notion of the colonised refusing to return the coloniser's gaze. The third perspective from which resistance is analysed is opposition. From this angle, resistance is a frontal attack on the political and economic structures of (neo) colonialism. It means saying 'no' to the oppressor and actually engaging in political and military struggles for freedom. This often involves nationalist liberation movements. The last angle from which resistance is perceived is transformation. This perspective stresses the need for the oppressed to resist by 1) not participating in his/her subjugation and 2) adopting a way of being that can lead to a mutualistic transformation of exploitative systems. This transformation can only be successful when it is participative, not antagonistic. David Jeffress in *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation and Transformation* defines this type of resistance as "the transformation of the material and discursive structures that maintain oppression, and a 'new humanism'" (134).

In this article, resistance is conceived as an ideological practice that is nurtured by and responds to (neo) colonialism. It is a practice that is carried out by the colonised in three ways: revisiting the past, inspecting the present and denouncing the perpetuation of oppressive systems. Resistance begins with knowing one's past and is fuelled by the investigation of neo-colonial actualities. These culminate into the overt denunciation of oppression – that vigorous critique of colonial power which upholds and accompanies every political struggle.

In this paper, neo-colonialism is understood as the continuation of colonial practices with the active complicity of the leaders of the "former" colony. It is a new

form of oppression because the coloniser's power is exerted indirectly on the colonised with subtle assaults on the latter's socio-economic and political life. We subscribe to Philip Altbach's view in "Education and Neocolonialism" that neo-colonialism is a "planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries, but it is also simply a continuation of past [colonial] practices" (452). Hence, resisting neo-colonialism implies the critique of the whole colonial syndrome with its multifarious patterns.

Resistance and Memory

The human mind is an impartial sponge that absorbs all kinds of experiences, the glorious and painful ones, as well as the dilemmas it has had to confront. However, progressively, some of these memories can be forgotten, deformed and blurred due to the mere passage of time and the occurrence of new societal orders. European colonialism is one of such orders or Establishments that has left perennial ignominious stains in the memories of people living in the "Third World". It has perverted native cultures, installed brutal political systems and exploited the native physically, economically and psychologically. Curiously, it has been observed that, in their ways of being, those who live in the postcolonies in general and Black Africa in particular tend to "forget" this past: their cultural identities and the origin of their fragmented existence. This situation explains the central place that African writers, conscious of the need to resist neo-colonialism, confer to history and memory in their works. Tim Woods (qtd in Dennis Walder) opines that within the ambits of African literatures, history and memory "are the crucial sites where postcolonial national and cultural identities are being formed and contested" (118). Hence, resistance begins when the oppressed constructs his identity with the historical events and values that gave birth to it. In this section, Mbuh's "Reply to Ted Jones" and "I Still Hear the Vulture" are discussed as poems that foreground the importance of history to the practice of resistance.

"Reply to Ted Jones" is a poem that builds a response to the Occident through the invocation of Africa's history. The speaker opens the poem by pitting "your" (the West) to "our" (Africa). The first two stanzas recall the brutal and surreptitious manner in which colonialism forced its way into Africa producing in this very process multifarious narratives of violence. The speaker personifies colonialism by condemning its "sneaking steps" and "nagging knocks" on his continent. He "recalls" this historical episode because it marked the beginning of "the black dirge" – the sufferings of Black people that have lasted for centuries. The poet describes Africa's history as having a "sandy membrane" caused by colonization. This membrane is metaphorically

presented as a sandy one to highlight the fragmentation of African identity and space into dispersed particles. Just as sand can hardly be put together to form a strong block, it will be difficult to reconstruct the shattered identities of Africans. To show his determination to remember this dolorous colonial experience, the speaker in Mbuh's poem enumerates the events that constitute it: slavery and slave trade, the Berlin Conference, the murderous scramble for Africa and the heavy toll of exploitative and capitalist financial institutions on Africa. After reinstating this past, one that shows the role of the Occident (personified as Ted Jones) in Africa's predicaments, the speaker turns to the state of Africa "today" after independence in the next stanza. The poet goes further remembering the endogenous cause of Africa's problems:

BECAUSE
Today, today of apocryphal sunrises
Nurtured from Machiavellian labs
In bunkered palaces of Africa's capitals
Against the day of glory; (49)

In this stanza, the speaker recalls and explains that the independences or "sunrises" of African countries were "apocryphal" (fictitious) because they were ordained and actually prepared by European colonial powers. A sunrise marks and symbolizes a bright new day but in the case of Africa, this new dawn is tainted with an absence of autonomy, the continuous reliance on Europe. The historical allusion to Italian politician, Niccolo Machiavelli, aims at showing how post-independence African rulers were forged and moulded by European education in general and political sciences in particular. Actually, Machiavelli's famous book, *The Prince*, is based on the premise that a ruler should seize power and consolidate it by all means – even if it means being cruel and dubious.

Having been reared in such colonial notions of power, African leaders betrayed the hope for genuine freedom and decolonization. As the speaker rightly says, they worked "against the day of glory". Bill Ashcroft et al in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* remark that "education is perhaps the most insidious and, in some ways, the most cryptic of colonialist survivals" (425). The apparent intellectual prestige conferred by Occidental education on post-independence African leaders concealed its servility. They rather sought the material comfort of colonial modernity by living in "bunkered palaces" while the masses wallow till date in misery and exploitation as the fourth stanza explains:

BECAUSE
From cockpits of Kilimanjaro-altitudes,
And from defruited Eden of Fako's laps
And along mined beaches-in-Bakassi
And mortgaged oil pumps of a Galian landlord,
Carting every mite into strongrooms
Of a French miser and along Zurich's lakeways; (49)

These African leaders, in connivance with their European teachers/masters, have offered the rich natural resources of their countries to the latter. In Cameroon, like in Kenya and other states, the mineral and petroleum resources are directed to and benefit European powers like France and Switzerland. Hence, colonial domination on Africa continues "BECAUSE" of this complicity. It is worth noting that the poet's historical recollection highlights reasons for or causes of his present plights. The postcolonial being is always in a need to understand why he suffers and it is only after detecting the sources of his problems that he can build credible ideologies of resistance.

The poet also decries the rivalries that have opposed African politicians to one another, leading to wars in the post-independence era. These Africans fight themselves and expect Europe to come and end their wars. The poet says that in the course of these internal fights, Africans stand, "scanning the darkened sky every hour/For armies of salvation jumbos" (49). Here, the poet employs the poignant image of a battered people eagerly waiting and praying (since they look skywards) for European intervention to solve their problems. This attitude only reinforces the dependence of African states on the Occident and creates wretched societies that will cause "the tear of unborn generations". The poet, mindful of this neo-colonial context, ends the recollection of his history by projecting himself into the future of his posterity, an utterly bleak future. The speaker concludes the poem with regret, saying: "The Africa of Timbuktu/Is a monstrous/Nightmare/In apologia" (49). The poet, after revisiting his past, regrets that the continent of strong empires and civilisations has been wrecked by colonialism and neo-colonialism. Mbuh's "Reply to Ted Jones" ties with Rajeev Patke's assertion in *Postcolonial Poetry in English* that postcolonial "poets revisit history as a zone of imaginary recovery and recuperation… They solicit and raid history in order to understand how the colonial past led to their predicaments in the present" (9-10). Actually, through this poem, Mbuh presents his postcolonial condition as the result of a chain of historical events that he must recognise in order to build his resistance to neo-colonialism.

In "I Still Hear the Vulture", the poet's mind moves from reminiscence of the colonial encounter to ponder on the achievements (if there are any) of post-independence years. The title of the poem indicates that the vulture was present and was thought to have left but its presence is still felt and the echoes of its murderous dictates still resound in the vicinities. The vulture in this poem symbolises Europe because its scramble for power over other societies, like Africa, has led to many deaths, many human carcasses. The speaker opens the poem by saying that "Our cultured jargon has finally/Betrayed our stride of manhood" (19). "Cultrured jargon" refers to a colonially-framed consciousness. It points to the unintelligibility of some African rulers caused by colonial education and training. Colonialism has trained African leaders to have a language, and by extension a consciousness, that betrays the legitimate dreams of independence fighters. The speaker regrets the betrayal of martyrs who carried the burdens of the people in their hearts and courageously championed struggles for freedom. They were betrayed by intellectual and middle-class elites who took over power after independence. At a time when many African countries like Cameroon celebrate their independence jubilees, the poet ponders to himself:

Can a string of soft, empty words
Stitch this gash of guilt
Which for fifty years has been ripped
By the painted lips that lip
The brush, whiting the pulmonary way? (19)

When the speaker looks back at these five decades after independence, it is a feeling of guilt and bitterness that overwhelms him. Not only have these countries been handed to administrators who have no skill other than wooden language, but their green forests quickly become white because the trees are sent to Europe.

The expression, "painted lips", metaphorically refers to the acculturation of African leaders to Occidental values. These African leaders actually act like white people wearing black masks. In other words, they give the impression to be Africans working for the interests of their populations but, in reality, they have been completely assimilated by the colonialists such that their vassalage toward the latter is total. Since they work for the West, these leaders export the natural resources of their countries to Europe thereby rendering blank or whiting the vital riches that make up the lungs of their countries. The poet also thinks that Western religious doctrines participate in this neo-colonial domination. In the fourth stanza, the poet talks about Western

religions that 'lip' or wipe away all the memories of torture from the African's psyche using ear-softening doctrines referred to in the poem as "jingled catechisms" (19). The speaker ponders on this European religious hypocrisy consisting in dissolving Africans' centuries of oppression in idyllic mind-lulling beliefs meanwhile "crouching" or maintain Africa in a position of servitude. Drawing his thoughts to the Cameroonian context, Mbuh directly points at France as the vulture that destroys Cameroon. He asks; "What if it is the French vulture/Beaking a fading tricolour,/Beating the harmattan air,/And seeding the withered garden/In time-clocked obituaries/From her Eiffelian heights?" (20). France, in the speaker's opinion, literally plants seeds of desolation in Cameroon to transform her former colony into a tattered graveyard where obituaries are read as often as the clock ticks. It is worth noting that France can cause these deaths without having to leave her capital, Paris; she has very reliable 'extension cords' of her domination in Cameroon who serve her colonial interests.

Therefore, resistance to oppression starts in the mind when the history and processes of domination are inscribed in the memory of the oppressed. This historical consciousness begins resistance since it provides the ideological ground for a crediblecontestation of imperial systems. It enables the oppressed to know where to begin his struggle for freedom. Dennis Walder in *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory* submits that "situating ourselves in time and space involves us in constructing a thread of meaning that enables us to know…who we are in the present: in other words, by narrative" (6). Through a recourse to history, Mbuh Tennu Mbuh in "Reply to Ted Jones" and "I Still Hear the Vulture" actually constructs a logical base for his resistance to neo-colonialism. He recalls the colonial encounter and narrates Africa's transition into the (post) independence period. Hence, the next step in this process of resistance is the investigation of the political, socio-cultural and economic manifestations of neo-colonial oppression.

Resistance and the gaze

In this section, gazing is understood as the act of looking at something with studious attention. The predicaments of post-independent societies push many writers to observe intently and critically the forms of political, socio-cultural and economic oppression that constitute the lot of the "ex" colonised. Mbuh Tennu Mbuh's poetry is postcolonial because it investigates the present manifestations of colonial domination over the masses. Describing the context in which postcolonial poetry evolves, Rajeev Patke in *Postcolonial Poetry in English* says that this poetry "shows awareness of what it means to write from a place and in a language shaped by colonial history, *at a time that is not yet free from the force of that shaping*" (emphasis ours).

Hence, the issues addressed in Mbuh's poems are intimately connected with the new shapes that colonialism has developed in Cameroon, and that must be resisted. This resistance of the oppressed is undergirded by his/her clear picture and understanding of their immediate realities. The subsequent paragraphs use Mbuh's "To Our Hon. MPs on Their Last Extra-Ordinary" and "Dangling Horizons" to underscore the poet's keen consideration of new forms of colonisation operating in Cameroon.

The poem entitled "To Our Hon. MPs on Their Last Extra-Ordinary" carries a footnote in which the poet indicates that he is talking about "The last session of the one-party parliament in Cameroon". This poem throws light on the defective democratic system in Cameroon and pays attention to the role of Cameroonian parliamentarians in the malfunction of democracy. The speaker is discontented with the political inertia, selfishness and hypocrisy of those who ought to represent the people and regulate the management of the nation. In the first line of the poem, the speaker talks of the "hands-linking" or complicity existing between these parliamentarians with regard to drowning the frustrations of the masses into pedant empty speeches. With insistence, the people have been expressing "legitimate ire" for decades. Like typhoid, their demands for political reforms have been feverish and persistent but those who should carry their voices are "shores of amorphous impotence". They are not concerned with the sufferings and aspirations of the people. When they sit in parliament, they speak of "charities" (the huge sums of money and cars that will be shared to them) instead of providing long-lasting solutions to the people's plights.

In the second stanza, the speaker revisits an important historical event, that is, the socio-political unrests of February 2008 following constitutional amendments that enabled President Biya to sit in for other presidential mandates without limitations. Contrary to the aspirations of the people who wanted change at the helm of the state, parliamentarians supported the regime in seat and legitimised its illegitimacy. Recounting the tyrannical nature of democracy in Cameroon, the speaker says:

In unholy gush of tears,
It chains Moslem in mid beads, to
Hoarsely Christian, still wriggling
On shell of divine land;
Coats the sniper's rationed balls
Against French helmets for the vague incumbent,
When in their mass or alien catacombs
They now fear nothing,

And desire no handcuffs of living fear. (16)

As this stanza explains, in 2008, Cameroonians from different religious and sociological backgrounds resisted the parliament's involvement with the violation of a constitutional law that was voted consensually in 1996. These Cameroonians, transcending the fear to resist, organised protest marches and were shot by police and military forces with the support the 'former' coloniser. All this repression was to safeguard the "vague incumbent" synonymous to unpopular president. Officially, the uprisings led to the death of forty Cameroonians but some NGOs evoke two hundred dead.

This brief return to the past enables the poet to understand that the turbulent period his country is living now results from "The refracted interludes of the House's humours/Canonized for distant seasons of sunny green" (16). In other words, the speaker realises that parliamentary sessions deviate from their normal missions in a bid to sustain as long as possible the regime with its empty promises. The expression, "sunny green" means uncertain futures since the green colour symbolises hope but this hope has been crisped by the scorching sun of tyranny. The one-party parliament institutionalises its moods and imposes them on the people such that the future of the latter is more and more sombre. The speaker goes further to indicate that when social upheavals occur, these MPs ignore "the inquiring heart" of the masses and muzzle their "fruitful blame" (constructive criticisms). The poet reveals that "only smells of fetid buds/Attend to the inquiring heart" (16). These fetid buds metaphorically stand for the stinking corpses of young people who ought to be alive like the fresh buds of plants but who have been the victims of a repressive government – one that kills young protesters to preserve its power.

In sheer hypocrisy, these parliamentarians breed chaos in the land by squandering the natural resources of the country for their egocentric adventures. They also use wooden language to circumvent the people's "sighs of colossal deprecation" (disapproval). In the seventh stanza, the speaker uses imagery and metaphor when he describes Cameroon as a place where "freshly cut roses/spread into virgin decades" (17). In these lines, young active Cameroonians are compared to beautiful roses whose blooming lives have been cut or shortened. Like these fresh roses, young talented Cameroonians see their lives shortened and wasted by an oppressive regime that makes them endure empty lives for decades – political emptiness due to repression and economic emptiness due to the growing rate of unemployment. As the speaker remarks the daily growth of cemeteries due to poor governance, he solemnly warns these old-aged MPs who rape the law in the last lines of the poem: "A hundred

millimetres of mis-trek for the People's throes/Is a century's retreat for their woes" (17). This means that the masses' painful struggles should be directed exclusively toward the betterment of their condition. When things are not done this way, as it is the case presently, the people's affliction is perpetuated. Thus, these MPs ought to trek with the people, not mislead them.

The message of this poem is ultimately directed to post-independence rulers in Cameroon who nurture the politics of neo-colonial oppression at the detriment of the population. The parliamentarians in this poem do not have any serious agenda for the nation over which they are presiding: they rule by improvising "singular blooms" (refined evasive speech) each time they are faced with "the hurricane" (symbolising the peak of social exasperation). This poem reminds us of Emmanuel Fru Doh's "Njangi House" where the speaker satirises a parliament of sleepy fellows who only wake up at the end of the session to clap at laws whose content they ignore. In a very sarcastic style, Fru Doh addresses them thus: "Representatives my foot". Actually, these parliamentarians are more representatives of their stomachs than of the people.

"Dangling Horizons" presents the stratification of the Cameroonian society into two main groups: the haves and the haves-not. These two classes are opposed to each other in the poem to expose the exploitation of the masses by an elitist class and the unequal distribution of the country's riches. The first stanza of the poem presents the bourgeoisie who settle in cosy towns like Kribi or Down Beach in Limbe to relish the best foods of the country and yet dream about more. The speaker says that the bourgeoisie "see paradise in their laps" (52). This image and hyperbole imply that these people do not make any effort to enjoy the bounties of the land; they simply sit and all the riches of the land are drawn to them: food, wine, money and charming ladies. The image of chunks of meat dipped in expensive wine ("Mouton Cadet") show how consumerist this class is. The bourgeoisie's affection for Western products make them exploit fellow Cameroonians to enjoy the former. Their consumerist and egocentric habits are informed by the desire to mimic the European way of life. In the first line of stanza two, the speaker reveals that in the lifestyle of these rich people, "Crimson showers from the skyline" are "replicated in a daze of epicurean patriotism" (52). This means that in marvelled stupefaction and longing to live like Europeans, this rich class accommodates itself with the beauties of Western modernity – Europe being metaphorically presented as their "skyline" or horizon, that is, where they situate their own future. This rich class is therefore disconnected form the realities of the people it governs.

On the other hand, there are proletariats who live in wretched and dangerous sites like Bakingili. These ones are in constant struggles for their daily pittance with no

hope of the improvement of their condition. What is interesting in the poem is the role each group plays in the nation. While the bourgeoisie class practices "Epicurean patriotism" (they claim they love their country simply because they are materially secured) and consciously forgets the plights of the masses, these masses who form the proletariat class really love their country. Why? The speaker explains "that too much love and hatred would trigger" these proletariats to fight to make things better in their country. Their patriotism is genuine because it rests on much love for the country and hatred to see that country ill-managed. It is this patriotism that the speaker celebrates here: patriotism of convictions and not that of the stomach. This questioning of the notion of patriotism is similarly emphasized in Mathew Takwi's "Redress" where he condemns the President of the Republic's distance from and insensibility to the "groans" and "oozing sores" of the people (4). The speaker in Takwi's poem condemns the bourgeois lifestyle of the President when he addresses the latter in these lines: "Your sparking limousine glides/On polished tarmac/While depravity cuts through your people/…You toy with life of the masses/While their hardship embrace your messes" (5). Like Mbuh, Takwi decries a situation where the bourgeoisie (symbolised by the President) accumulate tons of wealth while the population wiggle in abject poverty. These poems seem to advocate that this consumerist type of patriotism should be eschewed in favour of patriotism that is based on the desire and will to work for the welfare of the masses.

The speaker in "Dangling Horizons" ends his depiction with the prospect of a Marxist revolution. He envisages a period "when swinging lusts/substitute the dangling horizons/and cue in wail on deceit" (53). The speaker lives in expectation of the moment when the driving power from proletarian hearts will zealously overthrow the bourgeoisie and prompt the latter's deceitfulness to end. This end, however, will be in wails because the masses cannot rebel against a ruling class without people dying in the course. It can never be a peaceful revolution. The dangling horizons therefore symbolise the bourgeoisie and their exploitative system. Their governance is dangling in two ways: firstly, it hangs loosely on the assumption that they will always be rich enough to remain at the top and trample on the masses. Secondly, their exploitative system produces a bleak, uncertain future where the only reality is that the situation is getting worse. According to the speaker, such dangling governance and future must be changed.

In this poem, it is remarkable that the speaker indigenises the English language with the renderings of pidgin English. For instance, to emphasize the egocentric nature of the bourgeoisie, the poet describes them as "chop broke potters." A native English speaker would hardly understand what this expression means. But in the Cameroonian

context, this expression clearly indicates that the bourgeoisie, out of wickedness and selfishness, enjoy the meals and destroy the pots in which these meals were cooked so that no other person will be able to eat since there is no pot. In other words, the bourgeoisie relish the riches of the nation and prevent others from enjoying these riches too. In this way, they remain a "chosen few" living on the sweat and toil of the poor population. It is this situation that the speaker thinks should be reversed in order to obtain, ideally, a classless society where the riches are owned and controlled by everybody.

Thus, Mbuh's poetry throws light on the continuation of oppression after independence in political, socio-cultural and economic spheres of Cameroon. Although this oppression is rooted in European colonialism, it is presently perpetrated by Cameroonians themselves, especially by their egocentric leaders. This critical gaze on the societal practices and political structures of the country prepares the grounds for resistance to oppression. Ngugi Wa Thiongo'o (qtd in Jeffress' thesis) submits that "literature provides us with images of the world in which we live. Through these images, it shapes our consciousness to look at the world in a certain way. Our propensity to action or inaction… can be profoundly affected by the way we look at the world" (13). In this section, Mbuh's poems have presented images of impotency and exploitation. Conscious of the power of literature to push to action, Mbuh Tennu Mbuh provides a clear picture of the country's decrepitude. This serves as a prelude to the ideological dismantlement of Francophone political domination over Anglophones as well as the leaders over the masses.

Resistance and voicing

In postcolonial discourse, speech is not just a means of expression; it is the materialisation of the agency of the oppressed. His/her (in)ability to resist is determined by the efficiency of their speech acts. These speech acts are directed both to the oppressed and the oppressor for a mutual awareness about the urgency to pull apart the various layers of oppression. Haven described the predicaments of his society from the colonial encounter to the post-independent era, Mbuh has a solid ideological socle on which he builds a critique of neo-colonial politics in Cameroon. In this section, "I Defy!", "Franc Power" and "Nemesis" are discussed as poems that expose and blatantly denounce the perpetuation of the neo-colonial system and its practices.

"I Defy!" captures the resolution of the poet never to be silent to the manifestations of neo-colonialism in Cameroon. The ruling class that perpetrates all sorts of evils and expects silence in return will rather meet the poet's defiance and

resistance. In a very confident tone, the poet asks: "Who says I be dumb/and clip my lips/and watch the haranguing concert/enacted by puppets of a nightmare? Who prays I be sightless too, /when certain visions crumble/in colossal resurrection of evil/from particles of a dream that failed at dawn?" (29). Colonialism is metaphorically described as a nightmare that post-independent leaders in Cameroon keep enacting because they are manipulated by the West. The speaker refuses to keep silent and remain blind regarding the "particles" or legacies of colonialism that are continually restructured and armed to destroy the legitimate aspirations of Cameroonians. The speaker says his "nib" or pen is "dipped in the restive blood" of his woes. This image is used to remind us that the source of the speaker's art, his profound motivation is the people's tribulation. His blood is restive because he is not at ease until he unleashes his critique of the neo-colonial system perpetuating oppression in Cameroon. As a conscious writer convinced about the imperious need to free the suppressed masses from poor governance, the poet directly attacks Cameroonian politicians and parliamentarians who serve the interests of European imperialism against the welfare of their people. They have been "bred as valet for Gestapo chambers", oppressing the people under the supervision of the colonialist (30). When the speaker observes the misery of young people "who sing of woes untold every year", he is staggered by the insouciance of the ruling class (30).

The speaker ends up defying God to intervene and end the suffering of the population. Failing to do this, God will be accused alongside "the spiteful horde" (ruling class). The speaker thinks there should be no further tolerance of oppression. Using a Biblical allusion, the speaker says "alleluia tongues in breadless homes/curse God's benevolence in Canaan" (29). Here Canaan represents the ruling class. The poet therefore condemns God's tolerance of evil/oppression at a time when His own people or children are the main victims this ruling class. This explains the poet's distancing from faith in times of suffering: he prefers to consecrate his energy to freeing the masses from oppression than worshipping a Lord who is not ready to end "thorny weathers" of oppression. This poem raises the question of justice and ethics in postcolonial writing. The ethical standpoint supposes an aversion for oppression that pushes the oppressed to stand firmly against it and end it. Just as Mbuh in this poem interrogates God's justice and ethics by requiring his intervention, Emmanuel Fru Doh in "Africa's Journey" situates the success of the postcolonial struggle in its righteousness. Fru Doh says that this struggle "may take forever, /but virtue in the end will win" (18). Thus, the postcolonial Cameroonian poet morally justifies resistance and presents it as a struggle in which God must be or is from the outset a key actor.

In "Franc Power", Mbuh Tennu Mbuh addresses the issue of the overwhelming power of money in Cameroon. He also exposes the recurrent phenomenon of 'easy money', money obtained through magical and demonic practices. In the first stanza, the speaker clearly poses the problem when he says: "In my country today,/money can cook stones;/so they mint it from shit in nocturnal séances" (48). The hyperbole of money being able to cook stones indicates the pervasive power of money in post-independence Cameroon. It is omnipresent in all sectors of societal life such that its indispensability is obvious. As a result of this, some Cameroonians are ready to indulge in nightly mystical practices to get money. The speaker says that "the people love to breed, not bleed" (48). This frenzied quest for money pushes the people into laziness and assimilation by Western mystical sects. These foreign occult circles alienate the masses from their native culture and impose new kinds of spiritual power in the society. Riyad Shahjahan in "Engaging the Faces of 'Resistance' and Social Change from Decolonizing Perspectives" argues that "to undo colonial relations, we need to acknowledge the material and epistemological arenas (including…the spiritual) as sites of resistance" (279). Hence, in the practice of resistance, the alteration of the native's spirituality by money and foreign occult groups is an important facet of neo-colonialism that should be dealt with.

It is the deification of money in his society that the speaker exposes in this poem when he describes "the mutation of God, a miracle in francaemia/and God the concept, defined/and equated in franc rhapsodies" (48). The poet has observed that in his society, the unbridled love for money is like a disease that runs in the blood of his compatriots. Money has become the new God that dictates individual actions as well as societal practices. As a major effect of colonialism, materialism is a habit entrenched in the colonised and bred by capitalist international institutions like the IMF (mentioned in the poem as "Camdessure's prescription"). Mbuh seems to say that though money is helpful in many ways, it also perpetuates colonialism and capitalism through foreign economic control and repression.

In "Nemesis", the poet presents Cameroonians as their own greatest foe. They hate their own selves by maintaining inertia in society and spreading sufferings and deaths. "Nemesis" is a two-stanza poem that emphasizes the responsibility of the oppressed in his predicaments. In the second stanza, the speaker gives reasons for his fears and pains regarding his country. He says:

as we enthrone misery
in denial,
ensure new histories

and new geographies
and the incessant crunching of bones
between night and day
when nothing is said and nothing is done
because the invisible hand seals the lips,
twists vision,
and plastic smiles
spell our new history without contours. (52)

By using the pronoun, "we", the speaker addresses himself and his compatriots who directly or indirectly participate in their plights. Unlike other Cameroonians who refuse to admit their contribution to the reign of misery in the country, the speaker not only admits it but explains in what ways such negative contribution is done. Cameroonians "ensure new histories/ and new geographies" when they deform historical facts, leading to discriminations and biases. From these, secessionist movements ensue to form independent territories. This situation fosters killings and sufferings while "we" remain inert, making no effort to solve the problem. The "invisible hand" of the coloniser smothers every genuine political action and his "plastic smiles" (diplomatic hypocrisies) continue to shape the country's past, present and future. Hence, the country functions without bearing; its impotent leaders and inert population allow the identity of the country to be dictated by the former colonial power.

Therefore, one can say that Mbuh, the poet, sharpens his words to condemn overtly the perpetuation of the colonial nightmare. Andrew Ngeh et al in "Conscientisation and Political Liberation" present the two categories of writers that Africa has: "those who use their art to legitimize, uphold and advance the cause and ideology of the status quo; and those who use their talents to challenge the ruling class and, thus, champion the cause of those who bear the burden of oppression" (58-59). Mbuh belongs to the latter group because his poetry is aimed at dismantling Establishments – especially the one ruling Cameroon – from their colonial foundations to consensual sites of freedom.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the manner in which memory, observation and speech are used in Mbuh Tennu Mbuh's *The Oracle of Tears* to resist neo-colonialism. These three elements constitute the practice of resistance. The poet starts by revisiting his past as an African confronted with European colonisation. In this process of revisiting, memory is absolutely necessary because, as Walder rightly posits in *Postcolonial*

Nostalgias, "we do not know who we are without memory" (117). Recourse to history enables the poet to recover his past from colonial devaluation and understand the source of his present problems. The next step is to keenly gaze or observe the present functioning of his society to detect the subtleness of foreign control on so-called independent states like Cameroon. The last phase involves the poet's activism against the perpetuation of neo-colonialism. He does this by raising the people's awareness and lampooning the rulers who, in the case of Cameroon, serve as valets for France to ensure the continuous exploitation of the people and their natural resources. Though voicing can be considered as the culmination of the practice of resistance for a writer, memory and gazing are not less important in the articulation of resistance. The analysis of Mbuh Tennu Mbuh's poems demonstrates that postcolonial poetry is eminently and intrinsically political. As Patke rightly affirms in *Postcolonial Poetry in English*, "postcolonial preoccupations bring the aesthetic dimension of poetry closer to its cultural, political and ethical implications" (14). Poetry therefore becomes more concerned with content than form because the oppression witnessed by the colonised provides numerous issues to ponder on – issues ranging from reclamations to possible gateways for freedom.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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